

# SECTION 1

## Introduction

This section provides an overview of the history of the State Wildlife Grant program and the purpose it serves for fish and wildlife in North Dakota.

### 1.1 History of CARA, WCRP, and SWG

In 1999, historic conservation legislation known as the Conservation and Reinvestment Act (CARA) was introduced in the US House of Representatives. CARA proposed to reinvest a portion of the revenue from federal offshore oil and natural gas leases into state, federal and local conservation programs such as wildlife restoration, parks and outdoor recreation, coastal conservation, and historic preservation. Since the mid-1950s, all the revenue (about \$4.5 billion annually) collected from oil and gas leases in the Outer Continental Shelf had been sent to the federal treasury. As currently written, CARA would guarantee \$3.1 billion annually for 15 years to be used nationwide for a variety of conservation purposes.

For a variety of reasons, Congress has not yet passed CARA. In its place, Congress provided states with supplemental funding through Title IX of the Commerce, Justice, and State Appropriations Act under the Wildlife Conservation and Restoration Program (WCRP) for conservation of species which typically receive no monetary support. These funds were made available in FY2001. This program, sometimes referred to as “CARA-lite,” provided \$50 million for distribution among states. In 2002, states received additional funding under a new program, State Wildlife Grants (SWG), for FY02 through the Department of Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations. The SWG program is similar to the WCRP but provided states with increased funding of \$85 million. Funding for FY03 was approved at \$65 million, FY04 for \$70 million, and FY05 for \$70 million, for an impressive total of \$340 million nationwide in funding over 5 years.

Annual apportionment for each state was determined using a distribution formula of 1/3 land area and 2/3 population. No state receives less than 1 percent or more than 5 percent of the total amount each year. Due to North Dakota’s sparse population in relation to its large size, it receives the minimum 1 percent of total funds. The annual federal apportionment the North Dakota Game and Fish Department has received ranges between \$500,000 and \$750,000. Fiscal years 01-05 has provided North Dakota with more than \$3 million in federal funding. The SWG program is a matching grants program, meaning all federal dollars awarded must be matched with non-federal dollars. For planning projects, 25 percent non-federal match is required; and for implementation, 50 percent non-federal match is required.

### 1.2 The CWCS

By accepting these funds, North Dakota and all other 49 states committed to completing a Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy (CWCS) by October 1, 2005. Congress identified eight required elements to be included in the CWCS. The CWCS must identify and focus on “species in greatest need of conservation,” yet still address the “full array of wildlife.” The CWCS promotes a comprehensive approach to habitat and wildlife management to leverage conservation of all species.

North Dakota’s CWCS focuses on 100 **species of conservation priority**, including information on distribution, abundance, habitat requirements, threats, conservation actions, and monitoring techniques. It also includes information on all fish and wildlife. As new information is gathered, the CWCS will be updated to ensure the best scientific and most recent information is incorporated. Although the CWCS will change over time, the primary goal will stay the same: to protect, conserve and enhance all of North Dakota’s fish and wildlife for sustained public use and enjoyment.

### 1.3 CWCS Purpose

Why does North Dakota need a CWCS focused mainly on nongame species of conservation priority? In North Dakota, nongame wildlife represents more than 80 percent of the state's vertebrate fauna. More than 300 species of birds, roughly 80 species of mammals, about 75 fish, 15 reptiles, and 11 amphibians inhabit North Dakota. Freshwater mussels, crustaceans, and insects are also considered nongame. Often times nongame are the rarer and/or less studied species.

Nongame species are an integral component in the balance of nature. Populations for many of these species are declining or thought to be at-risk. Preventing species from becoming listed as federally threatened or endangered is important. A listing has the potential to influence how public and private land is managed and used. The cost of protection or restoration of a listed species is far greater than preventing its decline in the first place. From an ecological perspective, loss of a seemingly insignificant species can cause other animals to decline, or vanish. Such declines are hard to predict as many relationships are not yet well understood. Even so, animals that live in North Dakota are part of the state's legacy, and many people any loss believe is tragic.



*The SWG program has allowed North Dakota the opportunity to provide funding for much needed baseline survey work for a variety of species. Above, NDGFD and USFWS personnel visit a marsh bird survey site with a researcher. This SWG project will produce predictive models that relate presence and/or abundance of SoCP to habitat and landscape variables, creating a precise tool for implementation of conservation actions.*